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SUBJECT: NGO'S SAMARKAND OFFICE FORCED TO CLOSE DUE TO
ADMINISTRATIVE ILLEGALITIES

Classified By: AMB. JON R. PURNELL FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D).

¶1. (C) Summary: The local office of the Ministry of Justice took action against Amcits from the NGO Global Involvement through Education in Samarkand. Several were detained, harassed, and forced to sign statements. The organization paid fines for non-compliance with registration laws and voluntarily withdrew all of their staff from Samarkand. However, it denied any involvement in religious activity on the part of the volunteers, many of whom have been sent back to the U.S. to avoid further problems. End summary.

¶2. (C) Three Amcit volunteers with Global Involvement through Education (GIE), a non-profit organization focused on English language training, were fined by Uzbek authorities in mid-April for not properly registering with the Samarkand branch of the MFA and Office for Visas and Registration (OVIR). National Security Service (NSS) officers confiscated the volunteers' passports until fines of approximately \$600 were paid and OVIR registration was completed. Additionally, NSS, Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) and Ministry of Justice (MOJ) officials raided English club meetings being held by the volunteers. The authorities interrogated the students and confiscated various DVDs, videotapes and books belonging to the Amcits.

¶3. (C) Concurrently, a fourth Amcit was visited by the GOU at the GIE Samarkand office. He was questioned about his work in Samarkand and the authorities scoured the contents of the office, confiscating various reading materials and computer discs. The volunteer was forced to sign an unknown document without translation and given a scrap of paper containing a bank account number, to which a fine of \$400 was to be wired. The volunteer was told that he was being charged with teaching religion and that many students had provided the authorities with statements supporting these claims. He was released and left Samarkand with the entire contents of the office and the remaining Amcits. Eventually, four of the volunteers were repatriated to the U.S.

¶4. (C) The GIE country director spoke with Conoffs about the incidents and provided written statements by four of the Amcits forced out of Samarkand. He told Poloff that GIE was not a religious organization and did not promote proselytizing. He claimed that the MOJ offices in Tashkent and Samarkand provided conflicting guidance on registration. MOJ Samarkand informed him that the \$400 fine was not for teaching religion, but for continuing to operate out of the Samarkand office without proper registration. (Note: The \$400 fine has not yet been paid by GIE and they have not received any further pressure to settle the charges. End note.)

¶5. (C) Comment: GIE's experiences with the MOJ and its branch offices is far from unique as conflicting information, sudden changes of procedure, and outright confusion are the norm. This case again demonstrates Uzbek fears of proselytizing as well as the lack of transparency and due process that NGOs here face even when making a good faith effort to comply with the GOU's complex and ever shifting registration requirements. While it is unclear whether or not the Amcits were proselytizing, Post is aware that many NGOs do promote religion even as they provide various forms of assistance.
PURNELL